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Thank Rabbi
for your interest
George

Written by
George Oscar Lee
2720 NE 183rd St
T.H. 20
Aventura, FL 33160
305-937-6224

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OSCAR THE FIRE CHIEF

My wife Leah and I were only to glad to participate in the " LIFE REBORN" conference sponsored by U.S.Holocaust Memorial Museum and its SECOND GENERATION ADVISORY GROUP in association with THE AMERICAN JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE in Washington,D.C. during January 14-17th,2000.

The reason was simple enough. Leah spent almost 4 years in D.P.Camp Feldafing,being busy with the freshly organized Jewish Theatre " Amcho",which toured all the D.P.Camps in Bavaria. Having an excellent voice all the major roles including Lealy in Dybbuk were hers.

While in Washington I have met many friends, some I haven't seen in over 50 years. We had ample time to exchange some of our experiences during our stay in D.P.Camp Foehrenwald -U.N.R.R.A.Team #106 near Munich. My friends were curious how did I become the Fire Chief of the camp ? In "vino veritas" but I didn't need the second drink of vodka to tell them how did it all happened :

On Oct.10th,1945 I arrived in Foehrenwald by Wolfratshausen from Deutsches Museum in Munich the transfer point of all Jewish Displaced Persons. With me were my uncle Berl,aunt Dora and their children Ala and Manek Einsiedler. After being cooped up in Munich, the one large room for 5 people in Foehrenwald seemed like a palace. The fact that we had to share the bathroom with 2 other families in the same house at Florida Strasse didn't bother me at least. By the way all streets in Foehrenwald were named after the states in U.S.A.

I did arrive in Foehrenwald still wearing my combat boots, my Polish Army pants and my uncle's civilian jacket, that was it .Oh, I almost forgot to mention that I owed a pocket watch. I was 20 years old and all I knew was soldiering. While I barely shaved I was hardened war veteran. The Joint and/or U.N.R.R.A. gave us some toilet articles and some canned food. The very next day I took a walk to get myself acquainted with the camp. There were in the camp still few other nationalities not Jewish. The great majority at that time were Jews, mostly Polish, Hungarian,Rumanian,Lithuanian and Russian. The "linqua franca" of course was Yiddish. My own problem was that while I understood Yiddish I didn't speak it, having been brought up in a Polish speaking family. My parents spoke Yiddish so we the children wouldn't understand. Doesn't that sound familiar even today ? As I was walking on Michigan Strasse I heard "FIRE" "FIRE" which I understood immediately. Smoke was coming out of one of rooms.

A swift kick on the door and I was inside the room. The small fire was caused by an electrical oven.I disconnected the wire and poured some water that I found standing in pail near the oven. That was it.

" Isn't there a fire department in the camp ?" I asked a small crowd of curiosity seekers. " No" I was told." We don't have it ."

Well I said to myself let me than organize one. And without a second to loose I went to the building in center of the camp called " Die Verwaltung" or the " ADMINISTRATION".

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I told the German secretary Helga (that was her name as I found out later) that I wish to speak with "Herr Direktor" because of the fire. Helga the German and English speaking secretary brought me to meet with "Herr Direktor". It was an American ex-G.I. Henry Cohen of U.N.R.R.A.

She told him about me extinguishing the fire. This time Mr.Cohen a fellow maybe 4-5 years my senior asked me in broken Yiddish/German : " Was Du brauchen ?" What do you need ?

I told him that we would need some hoses and other equipment and above all overalls for my crew. " How many men Du brauchen ?" Not knowing how many I told him 8 ,just about a small squad in the army. " Very good und was is your name ?" " Oscar " I told him.

' We'll pay you a carton of cigarettes a week per man" . " I accept". I couldn't believe my luck. A whole carton of American cigarettes ! That was a fortune on the black market.

" Thank you Herr Direktor, I'll hire 8 men and give you the list with their names."

I walked out of the "Vervaltung's" building holding a carton of Camels the most popular brand. Noticing a group of young men I asked them in Polish if they would like to be firemen. Within minutes I had my men ,6 of whom were Polish Jews, I Chech who understood Polish and one Hungarian who spoke some Chech..

I came back to our "apartment" and announced to my family that I was gainfully employed and gave my aunt the cigarettes.By the end of the day several other young men came to me asking for a job offering me a carton of cigarettes as a bribe.

" Sorry fellows -the jobs are taken but if someone doesn't work out I'll take you in." We found some fire fighting equipment and I started to drill my men,shouting commands in Polish occasionally in Russian if they didn't perform to my liking. We grew in experience and I also started to drill the D.P.Jewish Police. We were issued American Army uniforms and helmets and we looked quite impressive.Small wonder that each time American V.I.P. would show up in the camp we performed like monkeys in a circus. Among those V.I.P's were Fiorello La Guardia, U.N.R.R.A.'s Chief, British Gen.Alexander, wearing a regular British uniform without a single decoration and of course " Ike" Gen.Dwight D.Eisenhower, loved by all.

Herr Direktor Henry Cohen left and was replaced by a former captain Bernard Robbins a no nonsense officer. By that time I had a workable knowledge of English thanks to a German tutors(both female and male) and belonged to a group of D.P.'s who were in the administration of the camp. In addition to our regular duties we supervised the sanitation and guarding the movie theatre.

It was during one of those regular meetings taken place in Mr.Robbins' office when our D.P.Camp Foehrenwald was surrounded by American Military Police and German Local Polizei. It was already second or third time when the German Polizei together with the M.P.'s surrounded our camp looking for "Schwarzhaendlers"- black marketers.

A tough looking southern speaking master sergeant brandishing a 45-caliber pistol was

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talking to our Camp Director Mr. Robbins. I couldn't follow his rapid speech, one word kept being kept repeated over and over again : "Kike" and "Kikes". At that time I wasn't familiar with that expression. I knew words like : " parszywy Zyd" or " yevreyskaya morda" but not "kike" which Mr. Robbins of McCombs Road in the Bronx, N.Y. explained to me later.

Suddenly " our" Mr. Robbins grabbed the sergeant by the collar of his shirt and by the seats of his pants and threw him down the stairs, yelling " you god damn f.....rebel, you are speaking about my people, get f.... out of here. I'm running this outfit and if you do not clear this place I'll be on the phone with Ike."

The sergeant picked himself up walked not so slowly to the parked jeep ,turned around and disappeared on the other side of the main gate. Few minutes later we heard the noise of started engines and a fairly large column of jeeps and trucks moved in the direction of Wofratshausen.

We were never bothered by the M.P.'s again. Mr. Bernard Robbins and I became very good friends. He was most helpful to me and my wife shortly after our arrival in the States in 48. Mr. Robbins whose family was originally Rubinstein died in 1976 of chronic myeloid leukemia just a year after attending the first reunion of Foehrenwalders after 30 years, which I organized.

